

# CA Public Talking Points

## November 2014

### Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) Improvements

The United States is committed to protecting our citizens and visitors from terrorist threats to their safety and security, as well as to working with our allies to protect their citizens. To help prevent the potential threats posed by those who seek to exploit visa-free travel to the United States while at the same time facilitating legitimate travel, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is announcing enhancements to the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA).

#### **Key Messages:**

- Changes to the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) questions go into effect on November 3, 2014.
- The changes consist of clarification of existing questions and addition of several new questions.
- These changes are a response to the security situation in Iraq and Syria and the concern that some foreign terrorist fighters, who carry passports from Visa Waiver Program countries, could pose a threat to citizens of all nationalities as they seek to travel to the United States.
- The ESTA improvements are intended to enhance security by helping the U.S. government to identify travelers more effectively who pose a risk to the United States.
- These changes are also intended to facilitate legitimate travel by resulting in fewer false positives, which require a traveler to apply for a visa.

## **What is ESTA?**

- ESTA is an online system for Visa Waiver Program (VWP) travelers to apply for and receive authorization before boarding an air or sea carrier to travel to the United States.
- ESTA, the Electronic System for Travel Authorization, was mandated by the *Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (9/11 Act)*. ESTA authorization became mandatory for VWP travel on January 12, 2009.
- ESTA authorization costs the applicant 14 USD and is valid for two years or until the passport expiration date, whichever comes first.
- A third party may apply for ESTA authorization on behalf of the traveler.
- Travelers who are not able to obtain ESTA authorization must apply for a visa at their nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.
- For further information on ESTA or to apply for ESTA authorization, see [www.cbp.gov/esta](http://www.cbp.gov/esta). Public inquiries may also be directed to 202-344-3710.

## **What changes are being made to ESTA?**

- Some existing questions have been clarified to make them more user-friendly. Additional questions have been added to the ESTA application. The new ESTA questions include:
  - Other Names/Aliases or Other Citizenships
  - Parents Name(s)
  - National Identification Number (if applicable)
  - Contact Information (email, phone, points of contact)
  - Employment Information (if applicable)
  - City of Birth

### **When do these changes go into effect?**

- The updated ESTA form will be available by November 3, 2014.

### **What do I need to tell the public about ESTA changes?**

- Most individuals will not notice the changes made to the ESTA questions.
- A traveler with an existing valid, approved application does not need to reapply until the expiration of the two-year approval or the expiration of their passport, whichever comes first.
- Information submitted by travelers through ESTA will continue to be subject to the same strict privacy provisions, use limitations, and access controls as under the current system. Online processing times will not increase.

### **What do I need to tell the press/host government about ESTA changes?**

- ESTA continues to be a highly successful program. The vast majority of travelers, more than 99 percent, have their applications swiftly approved.
- It is our intention to work with our VWP partners to tackle the challenge of foreign fighter travel and in general to update the capacity of ESTA to screen out those attempting to exploit visa free travel to the United States for illicit purposes, while better facilitating legitimate travel. We hope you will view this measure as necessary to secure our borders and protect the citizens and nationals of both our countries as well as the broader traveling public from terrorism.
- ESTA is not an electronic visa. A B1/B2 nonimmigrant visa application is different and much more complex than an ESTA application. A visa applicant must complete a DS-160 visa application, interview with a consular officer, and typically pay a fee of

160 USD. Visa applicants must also submit biometric information in advance of travel. These requirements do not exist for ESTA applicants.

### **Will the ESTA fee change?**

- The ESTA fee is 14 USD. There is no plan to increase the ESTA fee when these changes take effect.

### **Which countries participate in the VWP and use ESTA?**

Currently, there are 38 VWP participants:

Andorra	Australia	Austria
Belgium	Brunei	Czech Republic
Chile	Estonia	Denmark
Finland	France	Germany
Greece	Hungary	Iceland
Ireland	Italy	Japan
Latvia	Liechtenstein	Lithuania
Luxembourg	Malta	Monaco
Netherlands	New Zealand	Norway
Portugal	Republic of Korea	San Marino
Singapore	Slovakia	Slovenia
Spain	Sweden	Switzerland
Taiwan	United Kingdom	

Ability to travel under the VWP is based on the nationality of the traveler, not the traveler's place of birth or residence.